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AUTHOR Grose, Claudia; McNamara, Margaret; Lak, Charlotte
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ABSTRACT

This paper documents the journey of a professional developer engaged and trained to support the implementation of a literacy innovation in an urban school district. The innovation, First Steps, is a systematic organization of best practices linking assessment and instruction, supported by an ongoing program of school-based professional development. First Steps employs a teacher of teachers professional development model. The story of the professional developer's experience over 4 years as a site-based tutor, set against the backdrop of a district-wide initiative to improve writing instruction, documents and illustrates the lessons learned, and questions raised, about the personal and professional trajectory of a professional developer in the context of school reform. The paper analyzes the way the professional development model played out in the context of one school, suggesting how the experiences, personality, concerns, and beliefs of the professional developer, as well as the nature of supports for that person, affected the outcome of the reform. The paper draws on the findings of a 3-year qualitative research project which used data from personal journals, written records and observations, tape recorded focus group discussions, and individual interviews. (Contains 52 references.) (SM)

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"9, 10, 11 Staircases, Any One of Which Will Get You Where You Need to Be:" Odyssey of a Professional Developer

Claudia Grose and Margaret McNamara,
Bank Street College of Education
New York, New York

and

Charlotte Lak,
Springfield, Massachusetts School District

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9, 10, 11 Staircases...Odyssey of a "Coach"

The first thing I noticed
at this school
were the stairs,
9,10,11 staircases
(depending on how you count)
Any one of which will
get you where you need to be
(some more efficiently than others.)

The main staircase splits in
two directions,
equidistant and sufficient to
reach the second floor, but
separated by wide open stairwells
on the way up
(a chasm crossed by a narrow bridge
at the summit.)

My first steps at this school
were tentative,
unsteady,
reaching for safety,
security,
support.

This was a new position,
a new challenge,
an expectation for change
to be a literacy leader,
a guide.
And the school went in 9, 10, 11 different directions.

The principal sat
just to the left of center
as you entered the building
(and philosophically.)
Her vision was strong,
her focus, unwavering,
(at times unnerving.)
for the restructuring task was
formidable and complex.

The first year was
trial by fire
trial and error
try it out
try again
trying
but satisfying.
And I learned which stairs led where.

Year two
the bricks began to fall
--without warning--
from the facade of our building.
And our principal left
--without warning--
in November.
And each of us
inside the building
came closer to the center,
seeking safety,
security and
support.

Year three we watched
with anticipation
(and some trepidation)
as a new principal
walked in the door and
negotiated the
9, 10, 11 staircases
seeking the vision
and focus
misplaced
in our confusion.
And each of us did what was necessary
to stay centered.

My office now is
close to the center, too.
And often, like
Grand Central Station,
a hub for exchange of
ideas, materials, and
ideals.

9, 10, 11 staircases
bring those from different directions
together.

Charlotte Lak, 1999

"9, 10, 11 Staircases, Any One of Which Will Get You Where You Need to Be:" Odyssey of a Professional Developer

Claudia Grose, Bank Street College of Education; Charlotte Lak, Springfield, Massachusetts School District; Margaret McNamara, Bank Street College of Education

Introduction

In his address to the 1991 National Reading Conference, Gerald Duffy inveighed against the dangerous temptation of quick fixes and mechanistic skills packages that increasingly permeate teacher education and disempower teachers, especially in the field of reading. He urged, instead, professional development practices which enable teachers to grapple with complexities and become decision makers (Duffy, 1991). More recently in the Harvard Education Review, Stein, Smith and Silver (Fall, 1999) acknowledged the enormity of the changing expectations for teachers in this era of reform as they are required to engage in more transactional and inquiry oriented teaching. At the same time, echoing Duffy's concern, they raised another underlying issue that has been missing from the professional literature. What about the change agents themselves, those individuals who are increasingly responsible for providing the professional development which feeds the reform? How are they going about learning their craft in order to support teacher development in this new era? "Just as teachers will need to relearn their practice, so will experienced professional developers need to relearn their craft," they wrote. "If [they] are to be effective in supporting the transformation of teachers, they too must undergo shifts in their knowledge, beliefs and habits of practice that are more akin to a transformation than to tinkering around the edge of their practice" (Stein et. al., 1999 p.263).

What are those shifts, and how do they play out over time? What supports are needed, and to what extent should the experiences, beliefs and voices of those responsible for supporting the change be considered in its design and execution?

This paper addresses questions such as these. It documents the journey of Carla, one of a small group of professional developers specifically engaged and trained to support the implementation of a literacy innovation in an urban school district. The story of her experience over four years as a site -based 'tutor,' set against the backdrop of a district-wide initiative to improve writing instruction, documents and illuminates the lessons learned -- and questions raised -- about the personal and professional trajectory of a

professional developer in the high stakes context of school reform. Given the professional development model promoted by the district, we analyze the way that model played out in the context of one school, suggesting how the experiences, personality, concerns and beliefs of the professional developer, as well as the nature of supports for that individual, affect the outcome of the reform.

Drawing on the findings of a three-year qualitative research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, OERI, this paper was written as a collaboration between Carla and two academic researchers, whose roles were akin to that of "critical friends" (Lieberman, 1995; Hynds, 1997). Data emerged from personal journals, written records and observations, as well as tape recorded focus group discussions and individual interviews collected over three years. Transcriptions and notes were coded to identify patterns and themes, and preliminary data analysis and draft reports were shared, discussed and critiqued by all parties to assure accuracy as well as to generate further questions. Every attempt was made to remain aware of the roles and perspectives of the researchers and the researched, and to negotiate differences in perspectives and understandings (Merriam, 1989).

First Steps

Our original study documented the implementation in an American urban school district of a literacy innovation called *First Steps*. Introduced to this country from Western Australia in 1994, *First Steps* describes itself not as a curriculum or program, but as a "literacy resource," a systematic organization of best practices linking assessment and instruction, supported by an ongoing program of school-based professional development. Employing a "Teacher of Teachers" professional development model, *First Steps* personnel provide a small cadre of designated teachers, known as "tutors," with four to eight days of training in the theories and practices of the resource. The theory is that those individuals will practice the new learning in their own contexts and then pass it on to their colleagues in their home schools or district.

This emphasis on a teacher of teachers model of professional development was seen by the District as a compelling feature of the new resource. The availability of trained in-district or in-house personnel to support the growing knowledge base of their colleagues on an ongoing basis had both economic and ideological appeal. Especially in a climate of fiscal belt tightening, the opportunity for a one-time expenditure for training that would have exponential impact, was irresistible. Thus, one aspect of our original study attempted

to deconstruct the nature of this approach, the precise roles and expectations for the professional developers themselves. Who they were, what they knew, and how their life experience and beliefs intersected with their new roles were points seen as increasingly critical to the highly interpersonal work in which they found themselves immersed (Freidus, Grose, & McNamara, 1998).

Through the 1980's and 90's research focused on the role of professional development for teachers as a cornerstone of education reform. For the most part, the lens was on the nature of teacher change, and on the climate and context that supports such change. Studies elucidated cultural and structural conditions necessary for effective change (Newmann, 1996) and identified circumstances that support teacher growth and development (McLaughlin,1995; Lieberman and Miller, 1991; Joyce and Showers, 1991; Little, 1993, 1999). Other studies highlighted the changing nature of professional development, examining the precise design and differential impact of various kinds of professional development opportunities (Stokes, 1999; McLaughlin, 1999), positing that lasting transformation of practice requires more than mastery of new teaching strategies and skills; it necessitates fundamental inquiry into the nature of learning and the process of knowledge transfer (Joyce and Showers, 1995; Leiberman, 1995; Hoffman & Pearson, 2000). Researchers also traced the intellectual and emotional development of teachers as they encountered or underwent change (Hall & Hord, 1987; Loucks-Horsely & Stiegelbauer, 1991) and probed the need to balance teacher autonomy with the responsibility to build community coherence (Richardson, 1998).

While there are certainly useful analogies to be made here, for the most part the change process of the professional developers themselves is almost taken for granted. These are educators who are expected to assist teachers in reforming their practices and re-examining their beliefs. Their nomenclature alone suggests the myriad roles and expectations for these personnel -- coach, professional developer, tutor, critical friend, change facilitator, consigliere -- to say nothing of the varied contexts in which they operate -- district level, school based, "outside expert," or "inside" teacher- leader. While many stories of reform vividly describe the array of their functions -- from trouble shooting the logistics of implementation to reassuring anxious teachers, to subtly pressuring the 'resistant' participant -- little attention has yet been paid to how these professionals themselves acquire the skills and funds of knowledge necessary for navigating this broad terrain and negotiating the multiple and often fluid expectations of teachers, administrators,

politicians, parents, and the community. Even less has been documented of the supports that need to be in place to sustain these complex roles (Freidus, Grose, McNamara 1998).

Carla's Story:

Prologue

In the summer of 1995 Carla, a third grade teacher at the Eastern School was invited by a district administrator to join in investigating a new literacy resource called *First Steps*. For over twenty years Carla had taught in the district, initially in her own classrooms, then as a language arts resource teacher working with monolingual and bilingual children. A poet herself, her passion was writing, and she was always in search of new ways to engage children. "I was one of those teachers who loved to have people come into the classroom with suggestions." From the mid 80's Carla had embraced holistic approaches to reading and writing. Excited by the discoveries she had made in her own classrooms about children's literacy learning, she spent a few years as a Writing Resource teacher, providing professional development support to others. Thus, she brought to the task of reviewing the literacy initiative extensive background knowledge and a track record of successful teaching experience.

In the course of an eight-day training program, Carla and her administrator were exposed to *First Steps* philosophy, instructional approaches and resources. In the final two days they participated in workshops designed to help professional developers and teachers present this innovation to others. They learned that *First Steps* pedagogy rests on certain assumptions: that learning is co-constructed and involves inquiry, discovery and problem-solving; and that all children can learn. Finally, they understood that *First Steps* is designed as a whole school model and requires schoolwide commitment and consensus about its value and relevance.

All this made sense to Carla and her colleague, and at the end of the eight days they returned to their district, convinced that *First Steps* was just what was needed to enhance teacher instruction and boost student achievement, especially in the area of writing. Their enthusiasm was contagious enough to win the superintendent's support. By mid fall training was offered to Reading Resource teachers in all of the elementary schools. The expectation was that this cadre of newly trained teachers would apply their new learning and disseminate word to their colleagues. The schools then could decide whether or not to commit themselves to school wide professional development. "I found it so exciting when I

went to the workshop for the first time," Carla said. "I couldn't wait to hear it again. I wanted to know more about it... and when I got back to my classroom I couldn't wait to start using some of the ideas from the [*First Steps*] resource book"(12/96)

Others shared her view, and much to the district administration's surprise, the response that following spring was overwhelming. Over a dozen schools signed up right away and more had to be deferred. This literacy resource appeared to be just what schools were seeking in the face of increased pressure for higher achievement, and greater teacher accountability. As Carla explained,

> One of the things that many of us... had been wrestling with [was] how do we show people in other schools that we really are teaching, and our children really are learning...The assessments that were placed city wide didn't fit what we were doing...When I saw First Steps, it put it all together. All the pieces fit. Not only do they have the ideas for what you can teach and when you should teach it, but it also gave us a chance to assess the chidden and show others that 'yes they are doing these things...' I was so excited to bring it back and share (12/96).

The involvement of Carla and her colleagues in the selection and promotion of this literacy innovation engendered a sense of teacher efficacy and promised meaningful investment (McLaughlin, 1991). Within months, five other teachers were hired and, like Carla, were trained to be *First Steps* "Tutors." To these six individuals the District entrusted the task of carrying the reform forward.

The tutors would implement two models of professional development: Carla and one other tutor were each based in a single school, balancing their new *First Steps* roles with the more familiar but also newly revamped position of Literacy Resource Teacher. The other tutors served full time as itinerant professional developers, each supporting several schools simultaneously. Their roles followed the more conventional model of after-school workshops and occasional classroom demonstrations. All six tutors were expected to present periodic district-wide in-service days, introducing elements of *First Steps* reform to new schools coming on board.

Carla became a school based tutor at the same time that she moved to the Western School in the newly designed role of Literacy Resource teacher. In that combination of roles, she looked forward to broadening teachers' understanding of reading and writing instruction. Reflecting back on her experience and expressing her feelings in her own way, Carla turned to poetry.

Year 1

The first thing I noticed
at this school
were the stairs,
9,10,11 staircases
(depending on how you count)
Any one of which will
get you where you need to be
(some more efficiently than others.)

The main staircase splits in
two directions,
equidistant and sufficient to
reach the second floor, but
separated by wide open stairwells
on the way up
(a chasm crossed by a narrow bridge
at the summit.)

Western school was emerging from a long and turbulent history, when Carla arrived in early November. Principal A was beginning to make her mark. She had engineered a cosmetic, but psychologically important physical rehabilitation of the long neglected, sprawling 1917 building, an infusion of grant money which supported a series of professional development and curricular innovations, and an influx of new staff who were inspired by their principal's vision for change. A's goal was to revitalize the curriculum and the teaching staff, to "loosen up their thinking," by establishing a culture of inquiry that supported pragmatic innovation. While encouraging teacher experimentation, with holistic literacy practices and multi-age grouping, she also recognized that for some teachers, more traditional methods were necessary as an interim step. Increasingly impatient with the slow process of change, however, she decided that *First Steps* offered the kind of data driven, student centered learning that she wanted her teachers to use. It also provided the necessary structures many of them felt they needed. Carla liked "being in a place where people are taking risks and trying new things" (11/5/96 PM field notes). She shared her new principal's vision of teaching and learning, and was impressed by her commitment to "take her eclectic staff...and lead them to the future" (3/13/00).

Carla soon found, however, that her new colleagues were not so united behind this vision or their leader. The climate differed markedly from the cohesive environment of her former setting. "Coming here, everybody is in a different place," she explained. "They're all coming from different approaches... At [Eastern School] it was almost a single-minded

focus. It had taken 6-7 years to get there, but teachers coming into the building were told right off the bat 'this is the direction we're heading'"(12/96).

Even the architectural layout at Western suggested divisions among teachers. A cavernous central entrance hall bisected the wide and long two -story building. Heavy swinging double doors on opposite sides of the hall led to two classroom wings, widely separated both physically and philosophically. "In this building we're kind of divided into clusters, or quads they call them, " Carla explained. "And the team in this quad works very well together. You know, a lot of sharing... The other quad works from a different perspective...they're much more individual within their classroom."(12/96).

A number of teachers were closely following a literature-based basal series, while another group, mostly newer, younger staff, preferred more child-centered teaching methods using trade books and writing workshop. Although many teachers attempted to work collaboratively, the underlying tension was palpable. Each group felt devalued by the other. Some blamed the principal for these divisions, claiming she had her 'favorites', mostly among the new young teachers who shared her educational philosophy. While her supporters believed her to be open to shared decision making, her detractors never felt that collaboration was genuine; instead they saw it as contrived to support her own agenda. Even Carla came to see that Principal A was eager to "lead them...on her own map without always thinking about where they were coming from" (personal communication 3/13/00).

My First Steps at this school
were tentative, unsteady,
reaching for safety,
security,
support.

This was a new position,
a new challenge,
an expectation for change
to be a literacy leader,
a guide.
And the school went in 9, 10, 11 different directions.

This was the reality Carla discovered at Western. Within weeks she found herself confronted with teachers whose beliefs and teaching styles were different from her own, and who were unprepared to embrace *First Steps*. An equally great challenge was to embody the uncharted dual position of Literacy Resource Teacher and newly anointed *First Steps* tutor. The principal wanted her to play a consultative role, providing professional

development to teachers as they engaged with *First Steps*. It was up to Carla to translate that mandate into day to day reality. But how? And what about her duties as Resource Teacher? That position had been vacant for some time, and she sensed that the teachers had their own expectations of her.

Carla liked the challenge of pushing the envelope, of providing teachers with new ways of thinking about reading and writing. She never doubted that her colleagues were well intentioned, that they did want to see some kind of reform, but in ways that matched made sense to them. She quickly realized, however, that in order to win them over, she would have to find ways to make connections between their existing practices and *First Steps*. She saw that teachers were feeling overwhelmed by new, seemingly endless initiatives and expectations. She understood that some viewed her with suspicion, wondering what more she would demand. Principal A's abrupt presentation of her to the staff, with little advance preparation, had not been helpful.

Thus began Carla's balancing act as she tried to make contact in a variety of ways. Literally keeping her door wide open, she saw herself "at the receiving end of what teachers bring," responding as consultant, sounding board, provider of resources including materials and model lessons (Field notes TFG, 11/25/96). "I feel like my job is to let teachers know that *First Steps* is not really ...one more thing...It's 'Oh boy, something that's going to tie it all together for me.' So I am trying to do that on a teacher to teacher basis... because I find that it doesn't really work so well when you do it in a large group." (CL Interview, 12/96)

Often she felt "on the road all day," making herself available to 'such a variety of people who take to things at a different pace." Some colleagues were welcoming, others more aloof. Though she found it less satisfying than the one-on-one encounters, she attempted to find time on the monthly faculty meeting agenda to bring in something related to the literacy reform.

After a few months she scored a small breakthrough. In late spring Western School was one of the first in the district to have schoolwide training in *First Steps* writing. Carla was not surprised to hear the mixed reactions of her colleagues, some excited and eager, others skeptical and unconvinced. After the initial training, Principal A urged her to convene a group of teachers to link the *First Steps* materials to the recently disseminated District Learning Outcomes. Carla, still feeling somewhat of a novice in relation to *First*

Steps was reluctant to be seen as an expert. "I did not want to be called the instructor, or presenter or anything." Instead, she designed the day as an opportunity for teachers to think together about *First Steps* in the context of their classrooms, school and district. Her ploy worked.

> One of the best things that happened when this team came together was that some of the teachers who were hesitant or questioning about what this is all about... it helped them to truly understand and get a picture... It was another way of trying to get people to buy into it" (12/96 p.17)

The principal sat
just to the left of center
as you entered the building
(and philosophically.)
Her vision was strong,
her focus, unwavering,
(at times unnerving,)
for the restructuring task was
formidable and complex.

The first year was
trial by fire
trial and error
try it out
try again
trying
but satisfying.

And I learned which stairs led where.

Carla had long since understood that the *First Steps* reform, required more fundamental change in the teaching and learning process than simply mastering new teaching skills. The resource and even its professional development design were grounded in a process of inquiry and discovery. In the course of that first year, she recognized the discrepancy between the philosophical underpinnings of the initiative and the experiences and beliefs of some of the teachers. *First Steps* had been handed to them without preparation. Many had no context or prior experience within which to place it. "They're so teacher-centered. They haven't felt that shift to a student -centered classroom. So some of the ideas are foreign... they don't fit in with their perspective." At first she was surprised and worried by the gaps in understanding, and the resistance. As she came to see what was missing in terms of prior knowledge or beliefs, she wanted to acknowledge those lacunae, but felt constrained. There was no room or time to uncover, confront or reconcile differing

beliefs (Bleim & Davinroy, 1997). Nor was there a place for inserting the necessary building blocks that would support implementation of this new resource.

The mandate from the district and from the principal to move ahead with *First Steps* was a mixed blessing. Carla saw that because they felt they had to do this, teachers decided to "buy in," but she wondered how deeply invested they were. She worried about teachers staying at a surface level of implementation, or even of subverting the process. (Bleim & Davinroy, 1997; Little, 1999). Even though she had begun to win over the vocal skeptics or resisters, it was the silent ones who concerned her.

Compounding her challenge, Carla was expected to transmit and convey a specific set of skills and experiences of which she had only beginning knowledge. She had had less than three months of actually using the new *First Steps* strategies and materials in her own teaching, thus she had few of her own examples to share. When questioned or challenged, she feared her responses lacked authority. She also discovered the complexity of extending her role beyond workshops and one-shot demonstration lessons to that of ongoing coach and support. The issues of trust and teacher autonomy (or was it teacher defensiveness?) loomed large.

> Sometimes when [we] offer to help, we don't think we are going in as evaluators, but teachers see us in that role. When I talk with teachers I offer things that I might be able to help them with, or if they would like me to come into the classroom. Some people say "Please do!" and others say 'Oh, nice!' and back away... and others say 'No thank you!' (12/25/96).

It took all the ingenuity and skills she could muster to find ways to connect with teachers. Starting with those who were most open, she wracked both her brains and her files for materials, articles, teaching strategies that she could share. *First Steps* was part of her repertoire, but only part. She insinuated it where she could, always trying to show the connections to other contexts and district requirements. She had to tread softly, for even here was potential trouble, as those who responded to Carla were sometimes viewed with suspicion by their colleagues.

Year Two

Year two
the bricks began to fall
--without warning--
from the facade of our building.
And our principal left
--without warning--
in November.

In the Fall of '96 pressure mounted in the district and across the state for higher student achievement on state tests and increased accountability. Principals' jobs were on the line, and teachers were threatened with publicity if their students did poorly on standardized tests. Unhappy in this climate, and feeling less support for her vision of change, Principal A took early retirement and abruptly left the school in mid-November. This was a blow to those who had begun to engage with the reform, those who were perceived to be 'favorites.' To others it was a relief. Carla found herself in a curious position, having begun to understand the culture of the school, and remaining committed to advancing the *First Steps* agenda for change, and now uncertain about what lay ahead.

A veteran principal came out of retirement to take over temporarily while a search was conducted for a new principal. Thus, Principal B operated from week to week in the expectation that a permanent appointment would be made at any time. Instead, the search dragged on for months, leaving the school in limbo for the full academic year.

Drawing a distinction with the departed school head, Principal B described herself as "very traditional," wanting to know precisely where each child stood in terms of achievement. She admired her predecessor's energy and ability in securing grant moneys , but she saw her own job as one of consolidating what was already in place, rather than innovating.

Sensing teacher frustration about recent changes, she quickly reversed decisions such as multi- age grouping. Distancing herself further from her predecessor, and in response to the increased pressure from the district and the public, Principal B focused all available resources on increasing children's test scores. Respecting Carla's expertise in reading and literacy, she directed her to focus on the more traditional roles of assessing and

providing support directly to struggling children. Carla was assigned to teach one third grade class for the daily language arts block, thereby reducing the time she had available for in service work with teachers. Though deeply disappointed, Carla acknowledged that Principal B's manner and direction were probably just what was needed at this sensitive point.

And each of us
inside the building
came closer to the center,
seeking safety,
security and
support.

Carla tried to remain a positive cheerleader during this period of retrenchment and uncertainty in the school community. Teachers were tentative, anxious, unwilling to commit to any new direction. Sympathetic with their hesitation, and experiencing her own sense of let down, Carla nevertheless felt a responsibility to keep the reform alive. Turning her new third grade class assignment to advantage, she took the opportunity to build both her own *First Steps* expertise and a repertoire of ways to collaborate with teachers.

Quietly, Carla convinced Principal B of the value of *First Steps* and managed to rescue some limited opportunities for modeling the new instruction, conducting some demonstration lessons with a few teachers.

> Personally I feel like I'm responsible for making sure that this is happening, and that *First Steps* is something that people are aware of and attempting to use. ...Because it's my responsibility, if I don't see it happening everywhere, I begin to feel like I'm not doing my job and I need to get out there and do something else...I want everybody to try something, ...to see that they are at least making some attempt and that *First Steps* is something that stays in their vocabulary (12/9/96).

Carla's outlook reflected both her high sense of personal responsibility for the reform, and anxiety about her own efficacy (Hall & Hord, 1987; Little, 1999). She maintained a philosophical understanding that it would not happen overnight. "We just have to give it time, and give ourselves a little more time too...We're a work in progress, and I think as people see minor changes in what they do, and if they have some success with it, they'll be able to take it with them to the next step" (2/97).

Troubled by the mismatch between the teachers' beliefs and the *First Steps* premise (Bleim & Davinroy, 1997), and between her own deep beliefs about teaching and learning as reflective processes and the structure for professional development available to her, she

tried to find ways to reconcile it all (Hoffman and Pearson, 2000). To do so, she turned once again to her own experiences and inner resources.

Two new developments occurred in this difficult period. The school became part of a federally funded research project which brought three university researchers into the building on a monthly basis. At the same time, the group of six *First Steps* tutors began to meet together, under the aegis of the research project. For the first time, Carla began to feel that she was not alone.

Early in the winter, she persuaded the principal to make available some of the grant moneys to support after- school study groups for teachers interested in sharing and deepening their understanding of FS. In pressing for the study groups, Carla recalled what had been most meaningful for her as she learned new curricular or teaching practices: small group discussions and reflection. "When I first started learning [about writing]... one of the first things we did [was] sit down and write and reflect -- think about writing," she noted.

> I think we need to get teachers to be able to reflect and see all the good teaching practice that's going on, so they can begin to see that we're not imposing but that we're helping them to take what they already have done well and find those powerful moments in their teaching where things happen because something went on and the kids really bought in to what was being taught -- and think about powerful moments in their own learning too (4/28/97).

Hopeful that the groups would be self directed, she resisted the role of leader or facilitator, not out of diffidence this time, but out of a conviction that teacher ownership of the groups was essential. The initial efforts were stumbling, as teachers got mired in complaints and semantic arguments. Fearing the collapse of a potentially fruitful opportunity, Carla briefly took the lead in redirecting the discussion and then stepped back into a recording role. From then on the groups proved that her instinct was right. After two sessions she reported, "The study group was probably the best thing that happened at our school as far as getting FS going and getting people to listen to each other" (4/28/97).

The study groups marked an important turning point in Carla's belief in her own efficacy. They gave her a needed boost of success, and reinforced her internal sense of what she needed to be doing, even without strong administrative or other support. She noted that sharing activities and experiences made the learning "real."

> They're still at the 'doing' level, but in thinking about why it worked or how it looked with kids, they're beginning to reflect a little bit more...and what they might be able to do to change if something is not the way they wanted it to be (5/12/97).

"But I think that 'doing' is a good angle for a lot of these people," she added. "The 'doing' is bringing them to want to know more and understand better what is happening." Her comments indicated a more comfortable reconciliation of her personal beliefs about the process of meaningful change, a recognition that changing practice may or may not precede changing beliefs and that "some level of technical training can scaffold a developing teacher toward higher levels of thinking," as long as there is a "nesting of training within a broader construct of teaching" (Hoffman and Pearson, 1/2000 p. 40).

Months later she remarked that it was at this point that she finally realized that she could stop trying to do so much herself, and instead "create space and a place for [the teachers] to try. I finally let go of having it all on my shoulders." (personal communication, 3/13/00)

Years 3 and 4:
Ride on a mini roller coaster

For Carla the start of the 1997 school year augured well. She had survived a complicated year in the school, strengthening relationships with her colleagues, and deepening her knowledge about *First Steps*. She was pleased, too, that a critical mass of teachers were engaging more positively with the innovation, and making real connections. The appointment in early summer of a permanent principal, someone Carla had worked with several years before, brought relief that the waiting period was finally over. Carla and her colleagues looked forward to sustained new leadership, and a newly clarified vision.

Year Three we watched
with anticipation
(and some trepidation)
as a new principal
walked in the door and
negotiated the
9, 10, 11 staircases
seeking the vision
and focus
misplaced
in our confusion.
And each of us did what was necessary
to stay centered.

New to the role, Lesley ("Principal C") came directly from a leadership position in the local teachers' union, and before that she had been a classroom teacher. While she was well acquainted with the key players in the central office bureaucracy, the role of school leader would be a new challenge. She immediately saw the need to rebuild a sense of community in the school, and she wanted to make teachers feel supported.

Lesley demurred from announcing specific pedagogical or curricular goals. Carla was interested to hear her avowal that "whatever works for children is what is important. Whatever gets them going, gets them reading, helps them to achieve is fine with me."(L. interview, 9/97). Was this a return to Principal A's support of eclecticism and experimentation? Lesley expressed high expectations for teachers and children to take responsibility and be held accountable. She wanted teachers to have a kit bag of strategies so that they could be flexible in meeting the differing needs of all students (L.interview, 9/97). Team work was important to Lesley; classroom and schedule reorganization enabled grade-level common planning times and extended literacy blocks. " People who didn't normally talk to each other because of the group distinctions and [physical] separations in the building, are now talking and working together," Carla remarked early in the fall.

After only a few months, Carla perceived a shift in Lesley's stance. "It is my job to implement whatever I am told to implement," the new principal said. "I don't think it really matters whether I support it or I am positive about it... Whatever needs to be done is going to be done here."(L. interview, 1/98) She described her role to be one of implementing the mandates from the Central Office, rather than espousing a vision of her own. In line with increasing pressure from the public and District Office, what needed to be done here, she felt, was simply to raise the test scores.

The full import of Lesley's shift of stance did not come immediately. Once change had been mandated, Lesley believed, teachers could and should be accountable for implementing it in their classrooms. Having knowledge of an initiative, or of the learning outcomes, she assumed, would translate automatically into instruction. She had limited knowledge of *First Steps*, but accepted its pragmatic value, with its developmental continuum and instructional framework. If it was useful, then teachers should use it. Once again, Carla was handed the responsibility for making it happen, and she anticipated resuming her initial consultant professional development role.

As a sign of the changing emphasis, Carla moved from her long narrow office tucked at the back of one wing, to a larger space right off the central hall. A bulletin board outside her door prominently featured *First Steps* materials and products, validating teacher and student efforts, and inspiring new applications. The climate of the school began to feel more settled. Carla sensed that people were more willing to talk about things together rather than whisper through the grapevine. She was also pleased that "from Day one, there were teachers talking about *First Steps*."(10/97).

Nevertheless, Carla recognized that the transformation was not complete. Teachers were tentative and uncertain, wanting to invest in the new principal but understandably wary. Pressure from the state and district to improve test results intensified. For financial reasons the district-based tutors group, in place less than one year, had been disbanded. Although that had little direct impact on Western School, since Carla would continue to provide site-based *First Steps* support, it contributed to teachers' skepticism about the permanence of this new initiative and complicated her job.

> I really have to continue to be an advocate for *First Steps*, to keep it going...I really have to keep people talking about it and keep it in their vision and in their hearing so they know it's not dying...it's literacy, it's language teaching and learning and understanding how children learn. It's not going away" (10/20/97 TFG).

First Steps was neither just an add on, or something new, she insisted. "It's things we've been doing for years, but it's much more organized for us and it makes sense." She was encouraged to see some teachers taking this to heart as they made decisions about instruction "because it makes sense, not because the book told me I should do it." Long accustomed to seeing children's learning occurring along a developmental continuum, she now began to recognize that teachers as well progress along their own continuum of growth.

> I'm seeing that (evolutionary process)...going into my third year... watching some people who were very resistant at the beginning to the point where it was 'Who are these people (the tutors...?) Why do they think they know more than I do?' to the point where they're asking questions and asking for materials that support the kind of learning that needs to be in place to support writing, even though the writing is not there yet. So that person is making an adaptation... (TFG 10/20/97).

She knew it would be a big task to move teachers away from teaching as transmission of information to a more transactional process, but she was determined to try. Fortunately Lesley was content to let Carla take the lead. Deeply invested in teaching and learning as co-constructed processes building on the learners' knowledge base, and

involving a process of inquiry and discovery in a safe environment, Carla hoped teachers could emulate her modeling efforts and thus begin to make the shift (1/26/98). But she knew that would not be enough. She needed the flexibility once again to create mechanisms for teacher support that involved fewer one-shot demonstration lessons or planning consultations, and more sustained partnering with teachers. "I'd like to make it more than modeling, to make it a team effort...see where they are and know what they need. I also want them to see that if we work with each other's strengths, that's a great way to help each other out." She saw this as a way to build capacity, a form of guided learning that encouraged teachers to take increasing responsibility, with her support. This way of working with teachers, she hoped, would also demonstrate how they could guide children.

Carla had begun this third year with confidence at least about her own position. The new principal relied on her extensively, recognizing her commitment, her moderate voice and her ability to negotiate all the factions. Like Principal A, Lesley frequently delegated tasks to Carla; but now Carla felt more equipped to take on those responsibilities. She saw that teachers respected and trusted her. Thus she was able to argue for preserving flexibility in her schedule, so she could get into a range of classrooms more regularly. "I think I'm beginning to understand (the tutor role) a little better myself." She cast back to her own trajectory of learning, from the confident novice relieved to find the familiar in the unfamiliar, "Oh I know all this," to a recognition that it went deeper.

By mid year the familiar obstacles and challenges reasserted themselves. To Carla's disappointment, there were no more funds for the teacher study groups. In their place, she tried to use part of the monthly extended day faculty meeting to bring teachers together around *First Steps*. She remained confident of Lesley's interest in FS, but the principal's lack of deep knowledge about the innovation meant that she did not always understand what was needed to support its implementation. The schedule of *First Steps* meetings was often superseded by other items of business. Furthermore, new sets of directives from the district about test scores, and the Reading Resource Teacher's role, meant that Carla once again found herself with even more responsibilities for evaluating children and filling out reams of paperwork.

Her own roller coaster of self doubts and personal concerns reemerged. How could she reach everyone? They were all in such different places. How could she juggle so many differing expectations, including her own? As so often before, she found herself worrying about the extent of her impact. What about the quiet resisters? How should she

choose with whom to work? "I feel I'm in too many places to light any fires; I'm running around with a flint" (9/97). She questioned her own efficacy, wondering if her approach was too "loosey-goosey," too accommodating (10/20/97 TFG) . Did she need to be more forceful? "I like to offer my services, but I hate to feel like I am imposing, because then I don't feel the effect is the same." (1/98 inter) She admitted feeling it was part of her job to be more explicit with kids, but with adults she felt more diffident (Stein, Smith & Silver, 1999; Richardson, 1998).

She also discovered, to her astonishment, that her preferred style of going to classrooms where invited, had led to misunderstanding among others, who felt she only worked with a favored few. Once that was clarified more doors opened up, but she still saw it as a "tough nut to crack" because some teachers were still aloof, not because they didn't feel the need for help, but because they were nervous about having her in the classroom.

How much support should or could she provide? She wanted to help teachers learn how to use the *First Steps* continuum, for example, and was more than willing to work side by side with them on that task. She worried, however, about depriving them of opportunities to construct greater understanding. "Maybe I should be [doing more for teachers] but just in my own way of thinking, if we keep doing it for teachers, same as when we keep doing it for kids, when do they learn to do it themselves and understand the process?" (10/21/97).

Over the months her mood fluctuated from confidence and optimism to anxiety and frustration. Frequently she had to reassure herself that her own role was still emerging and that it would take time, especially in an environment that had experienced so much change, and where there were still philosophical chasms both among teachers, and between teacher beliefs and the *First Steps* innovation. This time the image of evolutionary adaptation applied to her own situation. "It's an evolutionary process, and it takes time to adapt to some environments that just are very foreign to what this new thing is," she commented (10/97). She found that she needed to remind herself again and again of the fundamental change in paradigm that was required. "It's a restructuring of the teaching...in the classroom. It's in process...but it takes years. You can't just say 'Go now and do!'"(3/98).

The outside researchers still came regularly, meeting individually with Carla, and convening the cadre of former tutors, most of whom now held other positions. She

welcomed these individual and group meetings because they provided an outlet for her. The content was often diffuse, however, and questions or issues that emerged wouldn't be followed up for many weeks until the next meeting. For the most part then, Carla struggled on alone.

But she herself noted that even those infrequent encounters helped her put her situation into perspective, to reflect on the long view and to think of the context of her teachers' learning.

> If they don't have any background knowledge in teaching writing and they don't have any background in the process of developmental education, then they can't really buy into this...but what happens sometimes is if there are enough people in the group who do have that information and can begin to see the value, and they start using it, then those who didn't see any value in it and don't understand it, and then begin to get the other outside pressures that writing is important.. then the questions start coming. We're in our third year here, and it's happening, it's beginning to happen that people who were the most adamantly against it... are now asking the questions.

My office now is
close to the center, too.
And often, like
Grand Central Station,
a hub for exchange of
ideas, materials, and
ideals.

9, 10, 11 staircases
bring those from different directions
together.

As the third year rolled into the fourth, things began to fall into place. Carla saw widespread use of *First Steps* throughout the school, its impact on student performance. She heard from teachers and children alike, their appreciation of the common language and labels of the new resource. She found teachers readily seeing connections between *First Steps* and other curricular areas.

The multiple and often conflicting demands and expectations from the district and the principal continued as well, often pushing First Steps back into the shadows. Teachers, while using the new resource more comfortably, felt pressured in other ways, and found profound contradictions between their newly acquired understandings about developmental learning, and the pressure of increased standardized testing.

Carla sympathized with the teachers' predicaments, but she discovered within herself a greater clarity about her role. The years of fluctuating experiences had enriched her knowledge of all the language arts, not just writing, and she had grown quite secure in the school culture. She was respected and valued by her colleagues who came to her steadily with questions and concerns. The principal, too, who was trying to find her own way, relied on Carla's advice and support.

Realizing that she represented a symbol of continuity, and a safe middle ground, in a climate that still held significant tension and division, Carla found herself able to articulate the kinds of changes that were required to anchor *First Steps*, and to help teachers understand the rationale and purpose for its use in relation to new initiatives. She knew well that the ultimate goals of deep change in instructional practices and improved student achievement were still very much works in progress, Nevertheless, she felt a quiet authority that had eluded her until now, and that was sensed by her colleagues. It had taken three difficult, stressful and halting years of effort.

Discussion

One year after her arrival at the Western School as a *First Steps* Tutor, Carla agreed to be part of a multi-year research study of the implementation of that innovative literacy resource in the city schools. Although the research team was concerned about the turmoil at the Western School and its viability as part of the research design, Carla's willingness and the district's evident confidence in her ability mitigated against those concerns. From the beginning, Carla viewed the research as an opportunity to engage in professional relationships that would enhance her own and her colleagues' work with *First Steps*. Throughout she was an important link to teachers, children, parents and administrators. She provided another lens through which to view, understand and synthesize information about the ways in which a whole school goes through the process of change. In monthly focus groups and individual interviews her voice was heard as she emerged from experienced classroom teacher to confident and effective *First Steps* tutor. While the constantly changing environment at Western School presented challenges, contact with Carla greatly enriched the research. "Getting closer to school people who are changing their practices presents greater opportunities for understanding the change process," wrote Ann Lieberman (1995*b*. p.3). "Closeness allows for greater depth of understanding of practice, particularly if the researcher is there over time."

Sustained attention to Carla's lived experience over the years revealed the many processes that a professional develop[illegible]ist work through, the multiple incarnations and roles that one assumes, the questions, concerns and insights that emerge. This personal evolution is for the most part, unacknowledged in the field. Yet, just as change in the classroom is often complex (and sometimes even messy) the personal evolution of the professional developer is far from neat or linear as it "rocks back and forth between ... past and future identities" (Hynds, 1997 p.13). Often we researchers found ourselves reflecting on and questioning what helped Carla to move forward, and what held her back.

Despite the framework of the more traditional, externally driven professional development training model (Hoffman & Pearson, 1/2000; Richardson & Hamilton, 1994) initiated by the district, Carla's school - based placement had potential to provide continuity and differentiation of support. Furthermore, her beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as the rich range of skills and abilities she brought to her position, led her, consciously or unconsciously, to attempt to create conditions that supported transactional learning (McLaughlin, 1991; Lieberman and Miller, 1991; Fullan, 1993; Lieberman, Saxl & Miles,

1988). From the outset she strove to engender trust and collegiality, to allow room for risk taking and guided practice. Understanding that learning is a process for adults as well as for children, she provided both direct skill instruction as well as opportunities for collaborative reflection and problem solving. Throughout the four years she struggled to help teachers integrate the innovation into existing goals and practice. While aiming for schoolwide change, she attempted to validate teacher individuality and creativity.

Still, the process of change was difficult for the teachers, and for Carla herself. The advantages of her permanent placement in the school were diminished by the need to juggle multiple roles, especially as new responsibilities were added almost weekly in response to district requirements. Missing from the design was the "understanding of the critical importance of the kind of massive and continuous support needed to cope with the inevitable tensions that come with the change process." Nor did any of the principals or the district recognize how the complex "web of interpersonal relationships ... often dominate the change process " (Lieberman, 1995*b*, p.7-8).

Yet nowhere was there the kind of guided practice and professional feedback for Carla that could have helped her as she traveled through her own trajectory of change, the very kinds of supports that she provided her teachers. Instead Carla had to rely on her own experience and knowledge forged in a different paradigm and context, feeling her way, and inventing as she went along. Her selection for the position had been due in large part to her 'expertise' in teaching writing, as well as her successful previous professional development experience. The assumption of her ability to build on that experience was not entirely unjustified. After all, she had successfully worked with teachers to develop new skills and practices. It cannot be assumed, however, that prior experience of teaching children will automatically or immediately translate successfully into a new role as change agent. Further, transfer of knowledge, or facilitation of another's learning, as opposed to personal application of a newly learned practice, is a cognitive task in itself, requiring a level of analysis and theoretical familiarity (Joyce and Showers, 1995).

There are strong parallels between adult's and children's learning -- both requiring active involvement as well as thinking and reflection. But there are stark differences, and Carla had to learn to craft her approaches accordingly, both in tune with her own preconceptions, and her sense of her colleagues (Brookfield, 1990). Greater knowledge of the progressions of adult development as well as a broader understanding of the world views of her colleagues might have helped her feel more comfortable in addressing their

differences (Oja, 1991). Although the goals and premise of *First Steps* were consonant with her own beliefs about teaching and learning, she also saw the discrepancy with the beliefs and knowledge base of her teachers, and the resultant changes in interpretation and application (Lieberman, 1995*b*). Even more disconcerting was the disjuncture between the outcome-directed goals of the district embodied in their implicitly transmissional mode of professional development, and the developmental and constructivist design of the *First Steps* resource.

Carla identified these discrepancies early on, but found herself continually surprised at how profoundly they affected her work. She came to accept the varied ways in which teachers implemented the new practices, seeing their progress along a continuum. But she worried about how to move them beyond the surface level. She intuitively understood that teachers' personal belief systems and knowledge base profoundly mediated their understanding and application of new practices (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Bleim, 1997; Richardson, 1994.) She knew that to make meaningful change, teachers needed to examine their beliefs and make connections, but she did not always know how to facilitate that process, especially in the light of conflicting points of view.

Occasional individual encounters with tutor colleagues and the periodic research sponsored focus groups provided some support. She valued her colleagues' ideas and suggestions, especially in specific content areas. It was also reassuring -- if disconcerting -- to discover that she was not alone in struggling with issues of process and efficacy. But strategic guidance was less evident, because everyone felt so unsure.

To better understand Carla's challenges and changes as reflected in her notes and interviews, we turned to the literature on stage development. Beginning with the work of Fuller in the 60's and more recently in the studies of Hall and Hord, 1987; Loucks-Horsely and Stiegelbauer, 1991; and Oja, 1991, parallels have been noted between stages of children's learning development and that of adults who are experiencing change. The Concerns Based Adaptation Model (CBAM), for one, has posited a sequence of engagement and levels of concern, as teachers undertake curriculum or pedagogical change. CBAM outlines a progression from the initial levels of early awareness and informational inquiry, through a set of personal concerns about adequacy of implementation and management of the innovation, to a reflective level about impact or consequence of the change. At the highest level of the scale, once the innovation is

internalized, the focus turns toward building capacity and adapting or refocusing the innovation for deeper impact.

In many ways Carla's evolution reflected these levels of concerns, though for obvious reasons they were related more to the process of facilitation than implementation of the innovation (Hall & Hord, 1987 p.224). Carla's experience, however, suggests an undulating or recursive path, rather than the linear, chronological progression indicated by CBAM. Data suggests that as teachers or change facilitators engage with innovation, they enter at different places and move back and forth among these stages of concerns as their background experience, new learning and unanticipated challenges intersect.

For example, when Carla first explored *First Steps,* she was curious and eager for *information*, but even then she was thinking about *consequences* as she envisioned the impact on teacher practice and student outcomes. Once engaged as a tutor, however, her diffidence about her own proficiency with the new resource contributed to her *personal concerns* about her ability to facilitate the learning of others. She struggled against being seen as an evaluator or bearing the mantle of "expert." Her internal conflict about the district expectations and the developmental nature of the resource led her to wonder if she could effect the kind of transformative learning required. How could she balance the teachers' desire for modeled lessons and concrete resource support, with her recognition that teachers needed time and permission to explore, to experiment, and then to come together to reflect, share and problem solve? How could she balance the need to provide honest feedback that would challenge existing beliefs and practices and at the same time maintain positive relationships with colleagues? (Stein, Smith & Silver, 1999).

The complexity of the school culture, the turnover of leadership and shifting priorities provoked ongoing *management concerns* for Carla throughout her four years. She was determined to keep *First Steps* alive throughout the school and to provide support for teachers in concrete ways. The question of how best to do so persisted. From the outset Carla understood the value of *collaboration* to deepen the engagement, and the importance of a cohesive vision supported by all parties, teachers, administrators and the district. She sought to create opportunities for teachers to support each other and to problem solve together. In a school culture so riven with distrust and difference, this was no easy task. Further more the shifting priorities of the district mitigated against true

coherence and collaboration, and challenged her constantly to find ways to make connections and links.

Concerns about *consequence* and impact of the reform permeated Carla's experience. Not only did she have to persuade teachers of *First Steps'* value to their own practice and to their students, she also found herself searching constantly for evidence of teacher application and understanding as well as student progress. This data guided her own process of determining how to refine, deepen or individualize support. But what should she look for, and what could she see? The ever increased pressure from district and principals influenced how she assessed that data and significantly heightened her concern about her own efficacy.

Though Carla personally would have welcomed the opportunity for teachers to engage in serious reflection on the impact of the innovation in order to hone or adapt it, she recognized that given the multiple changes in the school, and the intensifying pressures from the district, Western School was not yet at this stage. Her task was to soldier on, to search for more ways to demonstrate the connections between daily teaching, district requirements and the novel resource, and to assure school-wide implementation.

At one level, Carla's odyssey could be understood in the context of a developmental pattern that metamorphosed over time and with experience. In the early years, unsure of her authority and fearful of taking liberties with the *First Steps* content, she adhered as closely as possible to the models she had observed in her own training, even when she knew it bypassed teacher knowledge or beliefs. But she also brought to her position as change agent a natural inclination for and extensive experience with self reflection and risk taking. In her own classroom she had observed her students closely and used that feedback successfully to guide her ongoing teaching. Thus, *First Steps* felt like a natural match. In those first two years at Western, she attempted to apply this strategy to her colleagues, attentive to their responses and designing her supports and interventions accordingly, willing to use trial and error. Often she walked on egg shells; as often she found success and gratification.

By the fourth year, Carla had revised and consolidated her understandings and vision of her role. She was much more deeply knowledgeable about the content of *First Steps*, which allowed her to bring her personal experience to her facilitation. More significantly, she now saw evidence that her voice was quietly but significantly heard and

respected, by both the teachers, and the principal. This gave her the confidence to assert her own authority, to be more direct and explicit in helping teachers see and make the connections that would move them forward. Her sense of ownership of the innovation including her own quiver full of strategies allowed her to work effectively in the ever changing environment of school reform.

Nevertheless, our study suggests there was more to the picture than the passage of time and increased experience. What along the way made the difference? What more was needed? Turning once again to the literature on change, we read of the conditions for successful professional development, and research on teacher leaders (Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 1988; Wasley, 1991), and of the changing requirements for the practice of professional development (Roy, 1989; Rhine, 1998). We were surprised, however, at how little attention has been given to the actual experience, perspective or needs of full time professional developers, the very individuals who are increasingly entrusted with moving forward curricular or instructional reform (Rust, 1998; Richardson, 1998,1994). Yet significant parallels can be found in the experiences of these change agents and the teachers they support. As professional developers encourage the transformation of others, so too are they themselves undergoing change, and thus they too need their own system of supports (Freidus, Grose & McNamara, 1997, 1998).

Implications

The results of our study add to the fledgling body of research on the actual experiences and perspectives of the change agent. Our findings suggest some specific responses to support professional developers and to enhance their effectiveness. In addition, our findings point to the need for further research in this area.

> The interplay between acquiring a new body of knowledge and skills and developing new habits of practice is complex. Effective teachers have both a principled knowledge base and the ability to access and use this knowledge base in the very noisy interactive moment-by-moment decisions that constitute teaching. In order to support teachers' development of the ability to do this, professional developers will need models of assistance that reconcile particularities with generalizations (Stein, Smith & Silver, 1999 p. 265).

Just as students and teachers are not empty vessels, nor are professional developers. All bring with them diverse experiences, diverse ways of constructing knowledge, and diverse attitudes and beliefs. Like the teachers they support, teachers of teachers need sustained opportunities to extend the repertoire of skills and strategies that form the underpinnings of their work (Freidus, Grose & McNamara, 1998). These include ongoing and sanctioned forums in which to reflect on their own evolution, to understand their own funds of knowledge, and explore their attitudes and beliefs. They need room for collaborative inquiry, a place to question and consider the implications of their work, and to interrogate the nature of the reform itself.

Professional developers like Carla need authority to uncover and confront the assumptions and divergent beliefs of the teachers they support, and resources to guide their development of those mediating skills. Like effective teachers, effective professional developers search for evidence of progress, as a form of accountability, but also to inform their work. They would benefit, then, from models of different kinds of progress, along with guidance on what to look for and how to see it when it occurs.

Finally, room should be made to probe and elicit the experiences of the change agents themselves, for they promise a rich cache of valuable insight into the reform process. To ignore their voices and perspectives in the initial inception and ongoing implementation of reform, is to suffer a profound waste.

In 1995 Maxine Greene wrote:

> Neither my self nor my narrative can have... a single strand. I stand at the crossing point of too many social and cultural forces, and in any case I am forever on my way. My identity has to be perceived as multiple, even as I strive towards some coherent notion of what is human and decent and just (Greene, in Hynds, 1997).

Might she have had Carla and her colleagues in mind?

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